

Greatest 361

Chapter 361 Deciding to Invest

After dropping Camilla off at her workplace, Zachary headed to Trondheim Torg Shopping Mall to meet with Emily, his agent, and Heather Miller, his investment consultant. He expertly navigated his R8 GT through the morning traffic and managed to make it to his destination by 9:00 AM, the scheduled time for the meeting. He pulled up into one of the parking spots in front of the Trondheim Torg before alighting from the vehicle.

The early morning sun rays warmed up his skin as he locked the car doors. He smiled as the slightly warmer spring weather was to his liking. His mood brightened as he turned around, intending to start making his way towards the entrance of Trondheim Torg.

"Zachary! Zachary..."

Suddenly, a few juvenile voices sounded from a distance. Before Zachary could react, a group of youngsters, probably between the ages of twelve to fifteen, streamed forward and cornered him, forcing him into a tight encirclement beside his R8 GT. Their faces were all smiles as they glanced at him with sparkling eyes.

"Zachary! An Autograph."

"Zachary, sign my shirt for me."

"Zachary..."

Zachary was stunned as his eyes took in the over-eager faces of the dozen or so young men and women asking for his autograph. But that didn't stop him from agreeing to their requests since they all seemed like hardcore fans of Rosenborg.

He received a sharpie from one of the young men before signing his name on his shirt. Then, he handed the shirt back to the boy before moving on to another. Since he didn't wish to be overly late for his meeting with Emily and Heather, his scribbling speed got faster and faster as he signed his name on more and more items handed out by the fans.

However, after signing about a dozen autographs, he realized that the number of the fans crowding around him hadn't lessened. Instead, they increased by the second, as more fans joined in on the fun, seeking a chance to acquire an autograph on their own.

Zachary immediately decided to harden himself after signing the autographs for the first group of boys and girls who had approached him. For the first time ever, he rejected the requests of the rest of the fans with a few polite words before pushing through the crowd and heading towards the entrance of Trondheim Torg.

The fans let out sighs filled with disappointment and called out to him a few more times as he stepped away from them. But even though he felt a little remorseful for ignoring them, he still didn't relent. Since he wished to make it to the meeting place as soon as possible, he continued walking forward without looking back until he stepped through the enormous doors of the shopping mall.

"Good morning, Zachary," Emily greeted him right after he settled down on the seat opposite her own a few minutes later. They were at a corner table in a cafe on the top floor of the shopping mall. "You're quite late."

"Good morning, Emily," Zachary replied, smiling with resignation. "A group of fans intercepted me right in front of the shopping mall. That's why I'm late."

Emily smiled, her blue eyes flickering with a hint of amusement. "Maybe," she said, "you should always wear a face mask while moving around Trondheim. That will ensure that the fans won't bother you anymore, Mr. Popular guy."

Zachary smiled and turned his attention towards Miss Heather Miller, his investment consultant. Like the first time he'd met her, she was similarly dressed in a dark blue suit that matched her blue eyes peeking from behind a pair of chic spectacles.

"Good morning, Miss Heather," Zachary said, smiling at her.

"Good morning, Zachary," she voiced, reaching out with a manicured hand from across the table. "It's nice to meet you in person once again."

"Nice to meet you, too," Zachary said, taking her hand. "I'm sorry for being late. A fan incident outside interrupted me."

"No problem," she said, smiling and withdrawing her hand. "You were only late by a couple of minutes. I really don't mind."

"So," Emily chimed in with a smile. "Should we first order some coffee before discussing business?"

"Good idea," Miss Heather said. "A cappuccino would be nice."

"What about you, Zachary?" Emily asked, glancing at him.

"I'll also have a cappuccino as we discuss," he replied.

"Great," Emily said before calling the waiter. She quickly placed the orders and then sent the waiter away in only a few seconds.

"So, Zachary!" Miss Heather said after the waiter was out of earshot. "On the phone, you said you were ready to purchase the Tesla shares. Do you still wish to invest the 500,000 Euros you previously mentioned?"

Zachary shook his head. "I have decided to triple the amount I'll be investing in Tesla Inc. I want to buy shares amounting to 1.5 Million Euros as soon as possible."

Heather's blue eyes widened slightly. She seemed startled. "That's a very bold investment. Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure," Zachary replied. "Can you make it happen? Will you be able to find people willing to sell shares worth that much?"

Heather breathed out deeply before saying, "Tesla shares are always available on the Nasdaq exchange. We can purchase them during American working hours from Monday through Friday. We only need to

place an order using your brokerage account, and everything else will be automatic. You'll soon get people to sell you their shares."

"Then, what are we waiting for?" Zachary said with a smile. "Let's place the order after we finish our discussions here."

"That's okay," Heather said with a smile. "But, I need to do some preparations first before we can make the purchase. I want to ensure that your financial details and tax information are all in order before we place the order."

"You already have my details," Zachary said. "So, you can go ahead and make the preparations. My only wish is to get this investment over with as soon as possible."

"I understand." Heather smiled and stood up from her seat. "This means that you'll need to excuse me for now so that I can go and make some calls. We'll be ready to place a market order using your brokerage account in about two hours. Let's meet then."

Emily narrowed her eyes. "You're leaving before taking your cappuccino?"

"I have to leave right away," Heather replied. "Otherwise, I'll not be able to prepare all the details necessary to make such a large purchase in a couple of hours."

"Okay, then," Emily said. "Go and do what you have to do. But make sure that everything is in proper order before Zachary places the order. We don't want him to lose money or time because of a few neglected irregularities."

"Don't worry," Heather said. "I won't miss out on anything. See you in two hours." She added before picking up her handbag and striding away from the table. And soon, her silhouette was already stepping through the cafe's doorway.

Chapter 362 Interested Clubs

There were a few seconds of silence at the table. Then, Emily turned her gaze from Heather's receding shape before pivoting it onto Zachary. "Are you sure you wish to invest 1.5 Million Euros in Tesla stock?"

"I'm sure," Zachary said, smiling. "If I had more money, I would invest even more. It's a pity that I only have 1.5 million at the moment."

"As long as you're sure and thought about everything carefully, all is well," Emily said. "Let's hope that your investment makes some profit in a few years."

"It definitely will," Zachary replied confidently. He'd checked the share price of Tesla that morning and found it to be around 40 USD. The cost was many times less than the future over-1000 USD price. So, he would earn more than twenty-five times his initial investment if he decided to sell the shares when they were most heightened in price, for instance, in 2021.

"Emily!" Zachary said. "You can also think about buying some Tesla shares. You might be able to make some good money in the near future."

"That's not an option for me," Emily replied, shaking her head. "Instead, I wish to save most of my money so that I can start my own football agency soon."

"A football agency!" Zachary's curiosity was piqued. "What about your current one? Are you having issues with your bosses?"

"Not at all," she replied. "I wish to own my own agency, which will give me more freedom when handling my clients and other business matters. And, of course, I won't have to cut off a portion of my income to pay my bosses. There are just many advantages to owning my own company. My only hope is that you can let me stay as your agent when that time comes."

"Don't worry," Zachary said with a smile. "I have never once thought about hiring any other agent. You could also consider taking me as a business partner when you decide to start your company. If my career continues progressing well, I'll be able to contribute capital and some insight into young talented footballers that can be your future clients."

Emily's eyes widened. "Are you for real?" She asked.

"Yes. I'm sure. We can draw up an agreement and own the sports agency together. That's, of course, if you're open to the suggestion."

Emily smiled. "I like the idea," she said. "But let's revisit the idea next year when I'm ready on my side. If you're still interested in starting a football agency with me, we'll create an office in wherever city you'll be playing next year. Then, we can start business immediately."

"That's okay with me," Zachary replied. "I won't change my mind since I also wish to own an agency. That reminds me: Are there any top football teams that have contacted you? I'm referring to those interested in my services next season."

"I was just about to get to that," Emily said, lowering her voice. "Over the past few weeks, I've met up with the representatives of a few teams. The most serious among them are Juventus, Tottenham, RB Leipzig, and Manchester United. Those four teams have already tabled offers and even contacted the Rosenborg management about your availability."

"Those are all big teams," Zachary said, his heart racing with excitement. "But, please scratch out Manchester United and RB Leipzig from the list of clubs I can transfer to."

"Why?" Emily questioned. "You haven't even heard about their offers! What if they are willing to pay you a sky-high wage of more than 150,000 Euros a week plus a signing bonus in tens of millions? Can't you consider a move to one of those clubs?"

"As you should know..." Zachary paused as the waiter brought their orders over. Then, when she stepped away from the table, he continued, "Money isn't everything. First of all, I don't wish to waste more time playing in the lower divisions of any country. I want to play in the top leagues as soon as possible. So, RB Leipzig is out for the moment."

"That, I understand," Emily said. "But then, why are you scratching off Manchester United? They are a big team in one of the top leagues in Europe. Their representatives even hinted about the possibility of offering you a handsome wage of more than 120,000 pounds a week if you decided to join them. That would place you among the six highest-earning players at the club. Are you not tempted?"

Zachary breathed out deeply to calm himself down. "The money is good," he said. "But after Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement, no one can predict how things will progress at the club. So, I don't want to be part of their transition."

Zachary had witnessed Manchester United's decline during his previous life. The English giants brought in top coaches like Louis Van Gaal and José Mourinho. They also purchased several over-priced and seemingly world-class players like Paul Pogba, Anthony Martial, Romelu Lukaku, and ángel Di María, among others. But the club couldn't return to their glory-winning ways no matter how much money they splashed out. It was as if they'd been cursed, and they couldn't produce acceptable results for over a decade.

So, Zachary wasn't about to assume that he would accomplish the almost-impossible mission of bringing the club back to its glory days. And even if he wished to, he wouldn't know where to begin as the club's issues were likely from the top management's side, bringing about a scenario that ensured that no player could solve them.

"I see," Emily said after a few seconds of contemplation. "Then, I'll scratch Manchester United off the list. What about Juventus and Tottenham? They are the only other teams that have already proposed solid and attractive offers to acquire your services."

"Juventus would be the best option," Zachary said after sipping on his cappuccino. "But I don't speak Italian. So, I'll struggle to fit into the team for the next few years. But still, don't scratch Juventus off until we get a better offer. As for Tottenham, they are the best option for me to enter the Premier League at the moment. But I also won't decide until I look at the offers from other teams."

"Okay, I get you," Emily said, nodding. "Are there any more clubs that you won't consider joining? I don't want to do all the groundwork, and then you tell me to scratch them off the list at the very end."

Zachary chuckled. "Real Madrid and Barcelona," he said. "I won't consider joining them, no matter how attractive their offers are."

Emily's eyes narrowed as she sipped on her coffee. "Most footballers can only dream about joining Real Madrid and Barcelona. But you won't consider joining them even if they are to table down attractive offers! You're one weird player."

"Not at all," Zachary said with a smile. "I only don't wish to become teammates with Messi and Ronaldo. I only dream about competing against them."

"I see!" Emily said. "You have very lofty goals. But no matter. If you can continue maturing, you'll be able to compete against them fairly in the near future."

Chapter 363 Preparing to Face-Off against Lyon

As planned, Zachary met Miss Heather again after approximately two hours when it was almost noon. They were only two people at the table in the top floor cafe at Trondheim Torg since Emily had already left to attend another meeting. But that didn't stop them from going forward with the scheduled business.

"Have you made all the required preparations?" Zachary asked after they had exchanged greetings.

"Yes," Heather replied, smiling. "The only step remaining is you placing the order on the Nasdaq market to buy Tesla stock. After that, we can only wait for sellers to take you up on your bid."

"How long do you think I have to wait?"

Heather narrowed her eyes slightly. "The purchase will go through within a minute or two," she said. "If there aren't any unexpected situations that hinder your purchase, you should be a proud owner of Tesla Stock before we step out of this cafe."

"That's really great," Zachary said with a smile. "Let's place the order right away."

"Okay."

Heather quickly took Zachary through the share purchasing process using his brokerage account. They completed all the necessary procedures in less than an hour before placing their 1.5 million order on the Nasdaq market to buy Tesla stock. After that, they only waited for a minute before getting a confirmation that the trade had gone through.

Zachary's heart was racing with excitement as he was finally a proud owner of Tesla stock. He only had to wait for around six years before multiplying his initial investment in Tesla by more than twenty-five

times. He was in a good mood. A wave of relaxation washed over him, and he discussed a few other prospective business opportunities with Heather before saying his goodbyes.

He exited the cafe and immediately left Trondheim Torg before heading to Coach Bjørn Peters' gym. He soon forgot about his 1.5 million-euro investment and immersed himself in his training. Under the guidance of his fitness trainer, Zachary spent hours doing aerobic exercises and drills targeted toward improving his stamina and endurance. He was so focused, and before he knew it, it was already evening. He said his goodbyes to Coach Bjørn Peters before jumping into his R8 GT and driving back home.

The following two days became busy as the Rosenborg team trained from early morning to late evening. Zachary and his teammates utilized Tuesday and Wednesday effectively, going through drills to perfect their gameplan against Lyon. Be it positioning, passing, or shooting — they practiced them arduously under the strict supervision of the coaches.

Coach Johansen was more intense than ever, even though his team was already four goals ahead in the Europa League quarter-final clash. He pulled out all stops to drill his players so that they would be in their best shape for the game since he didn't want to leave any chance for Lyon to accomplish a comeback. He didn't permit the players to relax until Thursday morning — when less than ten hours remained before the start of the match.

"Guys!" He yelled from the sidelines to draw his players' attention. "I want you in the tactics room in fifteen minutes. We'll talk for a bit before utilizing the rest of the time before the match to rest."

The players immediately halted whatever drills they were performing on the pitch. Without wasting time, they marched toward the dressing room to clean up. And before long, they gathered in the dressing room to listen to their coach's pre-match briefing.

"I congratulate you all for completing another hectic few days of training," Coach Johansen began. "But our work is far from done as we play Olympique Lyonnais today at 9:05 PM in the second leg of the Europa League quarter-finals."

"Even though we're already leading by the four goals from the first leg, we can't relax. We've got to approach the match with a do-or-die attitude so as to kill off even the slightest of chances of Lyon

making a comeback. We have to remain focused from the first minute of the game until we hear the final whistle. Are we together, guys?"

"Yes, coach," the players replied.

The coach nodded and swept his gaze across his players in the dressing room before continuing. "For this game, we'll play ultra-defensive football as we don't want any risks. Since we already have a four-goal advantage, we'll play it safe and play with ten men behind the ball for every minute of the game. As we have practiced over the past two days, we'll sit tight in front of our box and ensure that the opponents don't create chances at goal. And that's how we'll qualify for the semi-finals without taking any risks. Are you guys with me?"

"Yes, coach."

"Good." Coach Johansen smiled and stepped towards the tactics board in front of the room. "We'll play with a 4-3-2-1 formation, comprising four defenders, three defensive midfielders, two attacking midfielders, and one forward. The two attacking midfielders will have to cover the wings when we're not in possession of the ball. Their primary role is supporting the defensive midfielders to defend rather than initiating the attacks. So, it's better to refer to them as central midfielders rather than attacking midfielders. Are we together?"

"Yes, coach."

"First things first!" Coach Johansen said and started inscribing the squad positions on the tactics board. "I'll announce the squad for today's game. In the goal, we have Daniel Rørlund as our keeper. Then Mikael Dorsin, Tore Reginiussen, Yerry Mina, and Eric Bailly will play as our four defenders."

"Our three defensive midfielders will be Thomas Partey, Mike Jensen, and Ole Selnes. Our attacking midfielders, who will also protect our wings and work with our central striker to score if there's a chance, will be Takumi Minamino and Nicki Nielsen. Finally, our only attacker for this game will be Zachary Bamba."

Coach Johansen paused and glanced towards Zachary's position. "Zachary!" He said. "I have given you the center-forward role since your scoring form has been incredible over the past few games. Moreover, you being on the striking line will force the Lyon players to remain under pressure throughout the entire

game. So, they won't dare to leave you alone and push forward in droves to launch endless attacks on us even if we play defensive football. Are you with me, Zachary?"

"Yes, coach," Zachary said, nodding. "I understand."

"Good." Coach Johansen smiled and turned towards Nicki Nielsen. "Nicki! You'll have to fall back a lot to defend during this game. Then, if there's a chance, you can initiate a counter and pick out Zachary so that he can try to score. Can you manage that?"

"Yes, I can," Nicki agreed readily. "For the team, I'm willing to play a more defensive role. Don't worry, coach."

"Good." Coach Johansen nodded and turned towards Takumi Minamino. "Takumi! The same applies to you. You'll have to help out the defensive midfielders and wing-backs to defend. If an opportunity arises, try to pick out Zachary with a long pass as quickly as possible. Are we clear?"

"Yes, coach," Takumi replied. "I know what to do."

"Very good." Coach Johansen clapped his hands and swept his gaze over the rest of the players. "All of you must remember that tactical discipline and hard work are the keys to winning this game. As the saying goes, a boat doesn't go forward if each one is rowing their own way. Through teamwork, we can achieve the impossible. We can win the Europa League. So, if you guys are out there on the field, try to cover for your teammates. Ensure to play as a team and defend together for every minute of the game. Then, we'll emerge as the victors today night. Are we together, guys?" The coach ended his little speech with a yell.

"Yes, coach," the players replied with zest while clapping their hands.

"Good, good, good." Coach Johansen grinned. He then went over a few more tactics before sending the players back to the team lounge to rest. As a coach, he'd almost completed his part. What remained was for his players to step onto the pitch and perform.

Chapter 364 The Tense First Few Minutes

The weather that night wasn't the best due to the abnormally low spring temperatures of about 4 degrees Celsius and the millions of rain droplets constantly pouring down on Trondheim City with a consistent heaven-given soundtrack.

However, the unfavorable weather conditions still couldn't hinder the over-enthusiastic Rosenborg fans from flooding into Lerkendal Stadium to watch the Europa League quarter-final clash between their home side and Olympique Lyonnais. By 8:35 PM, they had taken up all the available seats in the home and away sections of the stadium.

They braved the downpour and cheered at the top of their voices under the protection of their rain jackets. They were obviously in hyper moods as they waited for the game to begin.

What wasn't surprising was that there weren't any Lyon fans in the stadium that night. Due to their violent deeds in Lyon the previous week, the UEFA's Control, Ethics, and Disciplinary Body had banned them from attending UEFA games for the following twelve months. Thus, Olympique Lyonnais would have to play all Europa League and Champions League games without the support of their fans for a year.

"Welcome to the quarter-final clash between Rosenborg BK and Olympique Lyonnais," the commentator's voice resounded across the stadium when the clock hand pointed to the 8:55 PM mark. "In ten minutes, the two teams will commence their battle to decide who qualifies for the semi-finals of this year's Europa League. On aggregate, Rosenborg is ahead by four goals after Zachary Bemba demolished the French giants in Lyon last week. So, the Troll Kids will qualify for the semi-finals even if they only focus on defending to avoid conceding more than four goals tonight."

"Ladies and gentlemen," the commentator continued. "I'm Kjell Roar, your commentator for the day, and with me is Otto Bragstad, a former Rosenborg defender. He'll be our pundit for the night. Welcome, Otto!"

"Thank you," Otto Bragstad replied. "I'm happy to be here."

"So, Otto," Kjell Roar said. "What is your take on this game? Can Rosenborg maintain the four-goal advantage? Can they overcome Olympique Lyonnais, the French giants, to qualify for the semi-finals?"

"Qualifying for the semi-finals shouldn't be a difficult task for Rosenborg at this moment," Otto said. "They are already in a very advantageous position after scoring four goals in Lyon last week. If Coach Johansen doesn't blunder while designing the tactics, they should be able to qualify even if they field a second team."

"I can see that you're very confident in Rosenborg," Kjell Roar said. "But let's not forget that Rémi Garde, the Lyon coach, promised that he wouldn't give up until the last minute. In his pre-match interview, he said that his players and staff would do everything in their power to win the game and qualify for the semi-finals."

"Well," Otto said, "The previous week, the Lyon coach said something about treating Rosenborg as a super-strong team. He'd promised to pull out everything in his arsenal to defeat Rosenborg. But in the end, he still lost by four goals at home. I won't be surprised if something similar happens today night."

Kjell Roar chuckled. "Let's put the predictions and analyses aside as the players are already lining up in the tunnel. The Rosenborg players are in their black and white colors, while Team Lyon is in blue. The two teams will soon commence the second phase of their battle to determine who qualifies for the semi-finals. Ladies and gentlemen! Let's put our hands together to welcome the players on the field of play."

At that moment, the cheers hit a thunderous zenith as the players marched onto the pitch. The catchy Europa League anthem echoed in the background as the teams quickly lined up in front of the fans and went through their customary handshake ceremony.

The proceedings moved forward, and the excitement around the stadium shot through the roof when the referee conducted the coin toss and determined that it was the Troll Kids who would get the kick-off. Before long, all the players took their positions on the pitch, and the match was finally about to begin.

As kick-off drew near, the intensity of the downpour increased a notch. It soaked Zachary's hair and washed over his skin so vigorously, making him feel like he was in the flow of a river rather than a rain shower. But he didn't mind as all his concentration was already on the game that was about to commence. He continued standing gallantly over the ball while waiting for the referee to blow the whistle.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee finally kicked off the game two minutes later, when the clock hand had just pointed to the 9:05 PM mark. Zachary raised his leg before passing the ball back into his midfield. And since he was the center-forward for that game, he immediately ran towards the other side of the pitch and positioned himself between the two Lyon center-backs.

Due to the heavy rain, the first ten minutes of the game were a boring fight between the two teams in the midfield. When the Troll Kids were on the ball, the Lyon players would quickly close them down before tackling them. When team Lyon won the ball, the Rosenborg players would also retaliate and foul them before they could advance into the other half.

Sliding tackles soon reigned supreme on the pitch due to the slippery ground. And on several occasions, the referee had to stop gameplay to caution the players and warn them against hurting their opponents.

The downpour continued relentlessly, and the game proceeded to the fifteenth minute. The Rosenborg players soon settled into their defensive formation and parked the bus before their goal. They played with ten men behind the ball and only left Zachary on the striking line to sustain pressure on the opponents. They were obviously following Coach Johansen's ultra-defensive game plan to the letter.

However, Rosenborg's ultra-defensive strategy exposed its weakness not long after. The Lyon players took advantage of the few opponents upfront and launched endless waves of attacks against Rosenborg's goal. Before long, they arrayed themselves in a 4-3-3 formation and hoarded more than 70% of possession. Long passes and crosses became the order of the night as the Lyon midfielders and wingers unleashed dangerous balls into Rosenborg's box, seeking their two strikers.

The pressure on Rosenborg's defense became immense with every passing second. By the twentieth minute, the game situation seemed dire as the Rosenborg defenders struggled to clear the ball out of their defensive third due to the limited visibility caused by the rain. It looked as if Lyon was about to shatter 'the parked bus' of Rosenborg before scoring their first goal for the day.

A deep frown outlined Coach Johansen's face as he braved the rain on the sidelines while following the proceedings on the pitch. Due to the poor weather, the ultra-defensive tactics were not functioning well. The opponents were constantly taking advantage of the poor visibility to drop balls into the box. As a result, they had managed to sustain immense pressure on his team for the past ten minutes.

Moreover, he'd also noticed that a few of his players were underperforming. For instance, both Nicki Nielsen and Takumi Minamino were not trying their utmost to cover the wings. As a result, they had allowed the Lyon wing-backs to grow more confident and unleash more dangerous crosses into the box.

As for Zachary, he wasn't getting any balls on the striking line. He only remained sandwiched between the two Lyon center-backs without getting involved in the play. Be that as it may, Coach Johansen didn't blame him as he was the center-forward for that game. He was not at fault since he was already playing as a striker should on the team. It was just his teammates who had failed him by not supplying him with balls.

"We need to get Zachary into the game," Trond Henriksen, his assistant, said from beside him. "We need to get him balls so that he can apply some pressure on Lyon's defense. Otherwise, we'll lose this match."

"I know," Coach Johansen said, tightening the hood of his jacket over his head. His most urgent wish was for the rain to stop so that his players could settle into the game. Otherwise, he would have to rely on luck to best Lyon under such adverse conditions.

"What is your plan?" Trond Henriksen asked after a few seconds of silence.

"First of all," Coach Johansen said, "If Nicki and Takumi continue underperforming, I'll substitute them out of the game immediately. So, tell Paul Kasongo and Karl Toko Ekambi to start warming up. For now, let's also— Eh!"

Coach Johansen stopped midsentence as he noticed Henri Bedimo, Lyon's left-back, dropping another dangerous cross into Rosenborg's box.

Yerry Mina, Rosenborg's center-back, leaped up to clear away the danger but mistimed and missed the header. In the end, the ball descended into the box and made it all the way to Alexandre Lacazette's feet.

Alexandre Lacazette brought the ball under control with an outstretched boot close to the right edge of the box. Before any opponent could close him down, he drew his leg back and unleashed a curling shot towards the inside of the far post.

TENSION!

Coach Johansen's heart leaped into his throat as he watched the ball darting towards the goal. But just at the last moment, at the crucial juncture, before it could cross the goal line, the always-hardworking Eric Bailly slid in and intercepted it, sending it over the crossbar and out of play.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle and pointed toward the corner flag.

Coach Johansen let out a breath and wiped the moisture off his forehead. "Guys!" He yelled at the top of his voice. "Focus! Focus! Focus! Defenders! Start clearing the balls out of the box the first time before they bounce."

"Nicki! For this game, you're not a center-forward. So, put more work into defense. Takumi! Your work rate is poor, and you haven't released any passes to Zachary. You need to up your game right away..."

The coach yelled out instructions to his players at the top of his voice. He paced the entire length of the touchline, not minding the downpour in the slightest until he was sure that his players had gotten his message.

FWEEEEEEE

After a short while, the referee blew the whistle and motioned for team Lyon to take the corner kick. Corentin Tolisso, the Lyon right-back, immediately floated a teasing ball into the box from the corner flag.

Bafétimbi Gomis, the other Lyon striker, leaped high to connect with the ball. After battling Yerry Mina for aerial superiority, he angled his head slightly to plant a header towards the goal from around the penalty spot.

However, the Lyon striker's effort soon met an obstacle in the form of a leaping Mikael Dorsin. The Rosenborg left-back jumped up in the air and blocked the ball with his chest, thus preventing it from continuing towards the goal.

"Clear! Clear the ball away before it bounces."

Coach Johansen yelled at the top of his lungs as he watched the loose ball descending towards the left side of the box. He only breathed a sigh of relief when he watched Eric Bailly pounce on the ball with an uncanny swiftness before kicking it high and far towards the other side of the pitch.

On the pitch, close to the center circle, Zachary immediately took off on seeing the ball descending towards the left flank. Like a bullet out of a gun's muzzle, he escaped from the two defenders marking him and chased after the ball. He got to it just as it completed its first bounce on the wet surface before bringing it under control.

His heart was racing fast with excitement as he whirled around and turned to face Lyon's goal. Due to the lack of balls, he'd been bored to death on the striking line. But since he'd finally gotten an opportunity, all the frustration had disappeared. The only thing on his mind was how to get the ball into the back of Lyon's net as quickly as possible before the rest of the opponents could fall back into their positions.

Whoosh!

Just as Zachary was preparing to take his first stride towards the goal, his ears picked up the sound of a boot skidding across the wet surface. His sharp mind went into overdrive mode, and he reacted by instinct. He instantly dug his boot under the ball before leaping high and over the tackle.

Before any other opponents could close him down, he landed back on the ground with the ball glued to his green boot. And like a bolt of lightning through the rain, he took off towards Lyon's goal like there was no tomorrow.

Another Lyon defender soon came to close him down, just as he was stepping past the boundary of the final third. The defender rushed in, all guns blazing, and even tried to hold his shirt to stop him from advancing the counterattack.

However, the wet and smooth jersey rendered the defender's efforts fruitless. Zachary shrugged off his grip without looking back and raced towards the box like the wind. Before long, he dispersed the keeper, who had come out to meet him, with a few side-steps before burying the ball into the back of the net.

"GOAAAAALL!" Kjell Roar, the commentator, yelled at the top of his voice as the ball shook the net. "Zachary Bemba has managed to score against Olympique Lyonnais again. He wasn't involved in the action during the first thirty minutes of gameplay. But after obtaining a single counterattacking opportunity in the 31st minute, he has managed to punish the French giants again. It's Rosenborg one and Olympique Lyonnais zero. The aggregate score is now 5:0 in favor of Rosenborg. Surely, the troll Kids are heading to this year's Europa League semis. With the on-form Zachary in the squad, it seems like nothing can stop them."

Otto Bragstad, the pundit for the day, chuckled. "Zachary Bemba is a true-blue nemesis for Olympique Lyonnais. Last week, he scored four goals against them. He has now bagged another after only 31 minutes of gameplay. The Lyon fans, players, and even coaches will have nightmares, thinking about him for at least a few months."

Chapter 366 The Nemesis of Olympique Lyonnais II

The rain continued cascading down from the night sky at a constant rhythm. The precipitation soaked the jerseys of all the players and lowered the visibility on the pitch. Be that as it may, the referee didn't halt the game just because of the unfavorable weather conditions. He continued officiating the Europa League second leg game between Rosenborg and Olympique Lyonnais, seemingly as if he didn't mind the chilling downpour.

The game progressed, and the Lyon players continued launching waves of assaults on Rosenborg's box. They seemed not to mind that they were a goal behind and attacked with an ever-increasing intensity.

As the game progressed into the late stages of the first half, crosses and long balls into Rosenberg's box became more frequent and more dangerous. Anyone in the stadium could clearly see that Rosenberg's defense was under immense pressure due to Lyon's never-say-never attitude.

But in some magical way, team Rosenberg managed to hold on for dear life, even while facing the constant barrage of attacks. It was as if lady luck was on their side as several balls smashed off the goalposts while a few other shots from the Lyon attackers missed the target by mere centimeters.

And finally, after 45 minutes of gameplay, the referee blew the whistle and sent the players down the tunnel for halftime. Many fans relaxed and breathed sighs of relief. Their taut nerves loosened after their home team held on to the 1:0 lead until the end of the first half. As long as they could survive the next 45 minutes, their team would qualify for the Europa League semi-finals.

The atmosphere in the visitor's dressing room was gloomy at halftime. Even the very air around the place seemed to have turned a dull grey as the Lyon players sat around the benches listlessly and with deadpan expressions. The gazes of most of them were blank as they waited for their coach to address them.

Coach Rémi Garde observed his players for a short while and sighed inwardly. He didn't blame them for conceding the goal, but he empathized with them. They had strictly adhered to the game plan and played well during the first half. They had sustained pressure on the Rosenberg players and limited them to less than 30% ball possession and one shot on goal. But one moment of individual brilliance from Zachary Bemba had rendered all their efforts fruitless.

The young Rosenberg number-8 had once again displayed his overly-clinical abilities during a counterattack and scored Rosenberg's only goal during the 31st minute. The feat made Coach Rémi Garde wonder how the young player could maintain his form and sharpness in every game. The young player was simply abnormal.

"What to do?"

Coach Rémi Garde was at his wit's end as he scanned his low-spirited players. He wondered whether he should assign more men to mark Zachary Bemba during the second half. But after a moment of contemplation, he shook his head and discarded the idea. Since the young Rosenborg player seemed almost unstoppable on the pitch, it was better to ignore him and focus on other areas. As a coach, he preferred that his players play their own game instead of wasting their abilities, marking a very unpredictable player.

"Okay, guys, listen," Coach Rémi Garde said, clapping his hands to draw his players' attention. "I know that you're all feeling down after conceding the goal. But, please, don't give up. During the remaining 45 minutes of the second half, let's ignore the result and play our own football. Let's show these Rosenborg boys our football. Let's compete with our hearts without imposing any burdens on ourselves. Guys! Can you do that?"

"We can, coach," most of the players replied. But their expressions were still bleak and listless.

"I didn't hear you," Coach Rémi Garde yelled, causing his voice to echo across the gloomy visitor's dressing room like a thunderclap. "Can you guys go out there and play with all your hearts during the second half? Can you forget about the result and play your own football without imposing any pressure on your shoulders? Answer me!" The coach swept his scorching gaze across the players.

"We can, coach," the players replied, more or less in unison. And that time around, their voices were vibrant, while their expressions showed that they had regained a bit of their fighting spirit.

Coach Rémi Garde nodded while smiling. "Somewhere behind the professional footballers you've become are little, innocent boys who fell in love with football and never looked back while training arduously to achieve their dreams. The hearts of those boys are what matter. So, during the second half, forget everything. Enjoy the game and play for those innocent boys who love the sport with all their hearts. Can you do that, guys?"

"We can, and we will, coach!" That time around, the players replied even with more zest. For sure, they had regained their competitive spirit to a great extent.

Coach Rémi Garde nodded again as a grin outlined his face. "It seems like you understand what to do now," he said. "So, I won't bother with going over the tactics again. Just go out there and enjoy your football. Show the opponents how we do it in Lyon. That's all I have to say." He then marched out of the dressing room as the loud shouts and clapping sounds resounded behind him.

The second half began after the fifteen minutes of halftime. The good news was that the downpour had reduced considerably, leaving behind a slight drizzle with hardly any impact on the players. So, both teams played more aggressively, causing the game to become more intense and heated.

What was even more surprising was the enthusiasm and ferocity of Lyon during the opening stages of the second half. The players in blue became bolder and played beautiful football that wowed even the Rosenborg fans. They abandoned the long balls into the box and started playing a Tiki-taka style, comprising short passes from one end of the pitch to another. As the minutes flashed by, they looked sharper and more threatening while moving forward. Soon, they were threatening Rosenborg's goal with long and mid-range shots that added more pressure on the Rosenborg defense.

Eventually, their efforts paid off in the 71st minute. Jordan Ferri, a Lyon midfielder, picked out Alexandre Lacazette with a well-timed pass through the middle.

The latter controlled the ball at the border of the final third before skipping past Thomas Partey with his second touch. Before any other opponent could close Alexandre down, he squared the ball to Bafétimbi Gomis, his counterpart on striking.

Bafétimbi Gomis brought the ball under control at the edge of the box. He then whirled around and unleashed a hell of a missile towards the goal.

The ball took a deflection off Yerry Mina on its way towards the goal. It swerved and spun faster before homing into the back of the net. The Rosenborg keeper couldn't even react due to the deflection and the power behind the shot.

Rosenborg BK 1 (5) : Olympique Lyonnais 1 (1)

The French giants had finally gotten their first goal in the quarter-final of the Europa League in the 72nd minute. The goal seemed to boost their morale, and their fighting spirit soared into the skies. Within a period of a minute after scoring the first goal, they won the ball back and initiated another attack once again.

Maxime Gonalons, one of the Lyon midfielders, intercepted a loose pass from Mike Jensen in the middle of the pitch. He immediately threaded a pass towards the wing to find Corentin Tolisso, the Lyon wing-back.

Corentin Tolisso controlled the ball nicely close to the touchline on the right flank. He then skipped past a challenge by Takumi Minamino and raced towards the other side of the pitch like a whirlwind. His incredible pace allowed him to step into the final third in only a couple of seconds, and he unleashed a teasing cross without losing a moment.

At the edge of the box, Bafétimbi Gomis, the Lyon striker, pushed off the ground and rose in the air to meet the curling cross. He shrugged off Yerry Mina in a battle of aerial superiority before planting a header towards the goal. But the Lyon striker's effort was sub-par and weak, allowing the Rosenborg keeper to snatch it out of the air without exerting much effort.

Daniel Þorlund, the Rosenborg keeper, held the ball close to his chest as he glanced around. He was intending to waste a few seconds before taking the goal kick. But just then, he noticed Zachary waving at him from close to the center circle.

The Rosenborg keeper's eyes narrowed slightly, and his heartbeat quickened as he noticed that only two defenders were keeping an eye on Zachary. Moreover, they were the only players making up the Lyon backline at the centerline.

"A chance!"

Without losing another second, Daniel Þorlund raced towards the edge of the box before kicking the ball high and far towards the other side of the pitch. His intent was to play the ball a few yards ahead of Zachary so that he could set the young playmaker on a straight course towards the opponent's goal.

Zachary immediately escaped the harassment of the two Lyon defenders marking him and sprinted forward—towards the position of the descending ball from Daniel Berglund. His long strides covered a distance of more than ten yards in a few seconds, and he got to the ball at the border of the final third before any other player on the field.

But just as Zachary was about to bring the ball under control, he noticed the Lyon keeper racing towards him like a raging mad bull going after a Mexican showman in an arena. It seemed like the keeper intended to sweep the ball before Zachary could get to it.

"Dream on!" Zachary thought to himself.

Heart racing with anticipation, he stretched out his boot to control the descending ball with a simple tap after noticing that the keeper was still half a dozen yards away. His control was as magnificent as ever, and he managed to send it on a curling course a few feet over the head of the approaching keeper.

And then, within anything but an instant, he slowed down and changed his sprinting course abruptly. He circumvented the keeper by a yard or two before chasing after the ball. He got to it in only a matter of seconds and buried it in the back of the empty net to score Rosenborg's second goal for the night.

Chapter 367 Victory and Realization

Rosenborg BK 2 (6) : Olympique Lyonnais 1 (1)

Coach Johansen smiled and nodded in appreciation as he watched Zachary celebrating the goal with his teammates near the corner flag. The boy prodigy had done it again and utilized the single chance perfectly to score Rosenborg's second goal for the night during the 76th minute. As a result, Rosenborg was ahead of Lyon by an aggregate score of five goals with less than twenty minutes remaining to the end of the game. For sure, the team was heading for the semi-finals of the Europa League.

Coach Johansen turned his gaze away from the celebrating players on the pitch before pivoting it onto the substitutes warming up on the sidelines. He'd already decided to make a few substitutions before

the game restarted. His intent was to bring in a couple of fresh legs to help his team maintain the lead during the remaining few minutes.

"Kasongo and Ekambi!" The coach said while eyeing the two players. "Hurry up and prepare. I want you on the pitch in less than five minutes."

"Aye, coach," the two players replied in unison. Without further ado, they started donning their match gear in preparation to enter the game.

After roughly a minute, the goal celebrations ended. But just before the referee could blow the whistle to restart the game, Coach Johansen made his first substitutions for the night. He brought on Paul Kasongo for Takumi Minamino and also replaced Nicki Nielsen with Karl Toko Ekambi. After that, the coach settled back on the bench and left the onfield players to do their own thing. He'd already given all the instructions to the two substitutes. So, there wasn't any need for him to remain in the chilling drizzle on the touchline.

FWEEEEEEE

The referee blew the whistle a few seconds later, and the game continued. For the first time during the game, the Lyon players seemed to have lost all their on-pitch morale. They played half-heartedly and committed a few mistakes as the game entered its closing stages. Eventually, their lackluster attitude cost them, and they gifted Rosenborg another counterattacking opportunity during the 88th minute.

It all started when Arnold Mvuemba, one of the Lyon midfielders, tried to break past Thomas Partey close to the border of Rosenborg's defensive third on the right flank. However, the Rosenborg defensive midfielder slid in swiftly to sweep the ball off the Lyon man's feet with an outstretched boot.

Thomas Partey had timed his tackle perfectly — and as a result, the ball rolled for a few yards before finding its way to Ole Selnes. The latter brought it under control with a simple touch, and before any

opponents could close him down, he unleashed a lofted pass towards the center circle, where Zachary was lurking.

Once again, Zachary immediately took off to meet the ball. However, the Lyon defenders chased after him and harassed him as he tried to connect with the pass from Ole Seln?s. They even pulled at his shirt and ensured that he wouldn't break past them for the third time that night.

Nevertheless, Zachary didn't lose heart while bringing the ball under control. He remained composed and utilized his tall physique to keep off the Lyon defenders. Then, before they could react, he whirled around and executed an improvised version of the Cruyff turn as he tried to leave them in the dust.

However, the two defenders seemed to have already learned their lessons and were hell-bent on stopping him from launching any other counterattacks against them. They sandwiched him from two sides and even spread their arms wide to ensure he wouldn't break through the middle before the other Lyon players fell back into their positions.

"What to do?"

Lightning-fast thoughts whirled around Zachary's mind as he tried to escape the harassment of the two defenders. He considered diving to the ground to force a free kick out of his opponents. But the next moment, he discarded the idea since he was still positioned close to the center circle and a considerable distance away from Lyon's goal. So, even if he won the set piece, he wouldn't be able to convert it. He was in a dilemma.

But just then, Zachary noticed a silhouette in black and white racing along the touchline on the left flank. Even while using his peripheral vision, he immediately figured out that the player who had made the daring off-ball run from Rosenborg's side was Kasongo. And judging by the height of the sprinting player, he couldn't be mistaken.

"Hope this works."

Zachary immediately dribbled the ball back to his own half while utilizing his physique to keep the defenders at bay. After noticing that Kasongo was about to step past the centerline, he executed an abrupt Marseille turn and escaped his opponents' pestering. The next moment, Zachary's incredible

spatial awareness picked up an angle opening up. He whirled around and drew his leg back to unleash a raking pass towards the right-wing.

Whoosh!

The pass was on point, and it managed to take the entire Lyon defense out of the equation. It cut a diagonal parabola across the pitch before landing a few yards ahead of the sprinting Kasongo.

The short man didn't even slow down to control the pin-point pass from Zachary. He headed the ball onwards before continuing his mad dash towards the goal. His speed was incredible, and before long, he approached the keeper, who had come out to meet him at the edge of the box.

It was then that Kasongo showed his inexperience as a professional player. The next moment, he seemed to panic and then drew his leg back before blasting the ball towards the goal. Probably, he was hoping to propel it past the keeper with sheer force to score.

However, using pure power without applying technique was a mistake. The shot wasn't well-placed, and in the end, it shelled the approaching keeper's raised arms before rebounding away towards the left edge of the box. Soon, it bounced twice and headed out of play for a corner kick.

"Damn!"

Coach Johansen's eyes widened as he placed his hands on the back of his head. He couldn't believe that Kasongo had missed the goal when he was one-on-one with the keeper. The situation on the pitch shocked the coach, especially since he'd already gotten used to Zachary's deeds of converting every chance that came Rosenborg's way.

Additionally, Kasongo's missed opportunity reminded him about his team's weakness. And then, he started to seriously consider how his players would fare against opponents who could manage to contain Zachary.

For instance, what would happen if a foe ignored all the other players and focused only on Zachary? Would the other players rise to the occasion and score? Would his team still win games easily?

Coach Johansen's back broke out in cold sweat as he considered the possibilities. A frown outlined his face as he continued following the game's closing stages. He couldn't feel at ease even after the referee blew the final whistle and confirmed Rosenborg's 6:1 aggregate victory over Lyon a few minutes later. He was in a somber mood, especially after realizing a problem that Rosenborg might have to face in the near future. He had to train the rest of his players to become effective on the attack, or else his team would be in deep shit if an opponent ever figured out how to contain Zachary.

Chapter 368 Pending Missions

When Zachary's eyelids fluttered open the following morning, he immediately had a feeling that he had overslept. By reflex, he glanced around and noticed that the soft white-gold light rays of the new day were already seeping into his room through the gaps between the curtains, blanketing his bedroom window. But he still couldn't confirm the exact time. So, he scooped up his phone from the bedside table before glancing at the screen. And as expected, it was already 10:00 AM.

"Damn! How could I sleep for almost ten hours?"

Zachary jumped out of bed with a start, intending to wash his face before going through his customary daily yoga routine. But, just after taking the first step away from his bed, he felt his limbs and muscles weighing him down. It was as if his vessels and organs were full of lead instead of blood — a condition that caused him to experience a discomfiting numbness all over his body. He was even struggling to walk a few meters to the bathroom.

"This isn't normal!"

Zachary's eyes narrowed. He was sure that he hadn't over-exerted himself the previous night since he'd played as a striker, whose only role was to wait for opportunities to score. As a result, he wasn't that exhausted even after the referee blew the final whistle. He'd even run a couple of laps around the pitch to celebrate Rosenborg's overwhelming victory against Lyon after the game.

"Could it be due to playing in the cold rain?"

Zachary mused as he continued to stretch there in front of his bed. He performed a set of dynamic stretches, from the upper to the lower body, as the scenes from the previous night replayed within his mind.

The chilling downpour had been a menace during the game. But Zachary had forced himself to ignore the unfavorable conditions and only focused on the game. Eventually, he'd performed well and scored two more goals against Lyon during the second leg fixture. But, it seemed that all the running and sprinting in the rain had worn him out considerably. And that's why he was lacking energy and feeling pretty weak that morning.

"It has to be the rain." Zachary thought as he smoothly transitioned from the dynamic stretches to performing yoga poses. He began with the 'Downward Facing Dog' posture to bring calmness to his nervous system and also stretch his hamstrings and calves. He held the pose for a couple of minutes before switching to the 'Half-Front Splits' posture to open his hamstrings while easing the tightness caused by the intense running on the field the previous night.

Over the following few minutes, he switched to different poses, intending to boost his post-match recovery. He was a hundred percent immersed in his exercises, and before long, he felt the numbness that had been bogging down his body fading away. Soon, beads of sweat matted his forehead as he held the poses for longer and longer periods of time. But he persisted through the routine until he completed all the required poses for the yoga routine about an hour later.

By then, his body was no longer feeling weak. He cast his worries aside and quickly took a shower before feasting on a heavy and balanced breakfast. He enjoyed some bananas, fresh milk, cereal, and juice until he felt full and satiated.

Since Rosenborg had played an intensive match the previous night, the coach had given all the players a day off from training that Friday. Zachary wasn't in a rush to go anywhere that morning. He settled on one of the comfy couches in the living room before summoning the system interface.

The translucent crystal-like display appeared before his vision the next moment. And without further ado, he quickly navigated to the G.O.A.T missions' page to check out the details of the pending missions from the system.

Two weeks ago, right after Coach Johansen had announced the season's squad for the Tippeligaen, a new mission had appeared on the interface. It was a system mission requiring Zachary to help his team, Rosenborg, win the 2014 Norwegian domestic league trophy. But since Zachary wasn't sure that he

would be playing for the Trondheim-based club for the entirety of 2014, he had chosen to delay his decision regarding the mission. He'd neither chosen to reject nor accept the system assignment since there was a possibility of him transferring out of Rosenborg during the upcoming European transfer window, between June and the start of September.

A few days ago, Emily had given him the long-awaited confirmation that several top clubs were interested in him. Teams like Juventus, Manchester United, and Tottenham were already chasing after his signature. Additionally, Paris Saint-Germain, the prestigious French club, had also just joined the race to acquire his services for the following season. So, he had a lot of options to choose from if he wished to transfer. As a result, there wasn't any need for him to dilly-dally before making the decision regarding the system's 2014 Tippeligaen serial challenge.

"System!" He mumbled, leaning back into the sofa. "I would like to reject the 2014 Tippeligaen Serial Challenge immediately."

"Ding"

A low chime rang within Zachary's head.

"Command received," the system AI's apathetic voice soon followed. "The user has chosen to reject the 2014 Tippeligaen serial challenge. The system will immediately remove all the mission details from the interface."

Zachary breathed out deeply as he turned his gaze to the only remaining pending mission on the interface. He immediately clicked on it before starting to peruse through its details.

G.O.A.T MISSIONS

#PENDING MISSION: 2013/14 Europa League Serial Challenge

->The user has already accepted the mission and will receive the respective rewards after the end of the tournament.

*Milestone 1: Play over 80% of the fixtures in the 2013/14 Europa League tournament for Rosenborg (Pending).

*Milestone 2: Help Rosenborg qualify for the round of sixteen of the 2013/14 Europa League tournament (Completed).

*Milestone 3: Help Rosenborg qualify for the quarter-finals of the 2013/14 Europa League tournament (Completed).

*Milestone 4: Help Rosenborg qualify for the semi-finals of the 2013/14 Europa League tournament (Completed).

*Milestone 5: Help Rosenborg qualify for the finals of the 2013/14 Europa League tournament (Pending).

*Milestone 6: Help Rosenborg become the overall champions of the 2013/14 Europa League Tournament (Pending).

*Milestone 7: Provide the most assists in the 2013/14 Europa League tournament while playing for Rosenborg (Pending).

*Milestone 8: Become the top scorer of the 2013/14 Europa League Tournament while playing for Rosenborg (Pending).

*Milestone 9: Become the Best Player of the 2013/14 Europa League Tournament while playing for Rosenborg (Pending).

*Rewards:

->Milestone 1 completion reward: 2,000 Juju points (Pending).

->Milestone 2 completion reward: 5,000 Juju points (Achieved).

->Milestone 3 completion reward: 30,000 Juju points (Achieved).

->Milestone 4 completion reward: 50,000 Juju points (Achieved).

->Milestone 5 completion reward: 100,000 Juju Points (Pending)

->Milestone 6 completion reward: A dosage of S-grade vitality enhancing elixir (Pending).

->Milestone 7 completion reward: 20,000 Juju-points (Pending).

->Milestone 8 completion reward: 40,000 Juju-points (Pending).

->Milestone 9 completion reward: A dosage of S-grade mental conditioning elixir (Pending).

NB: There will be additional rewards if the user realizes hidden milestones that can unlock hidden missions.

->The user has already accepted the mission and completed some of the milestones. The respective rewards will be given out at the end of the tournament.

*Punishment if none of the milestones has been achieved after the stipulated time.

->Minus 120,000 Juju-points

*The user has to complete at least one milestone before the tournament ends to escape the penalty.

*Remarks: Only by imagining, believing, and attempting the impossible can one accomplish the impossible. Moreover, the word impossible should never appear in the vocabulary of any footballer vying for the position of the G.O.A.T.

Zachary smiled with glee after reading through the mission details. He'd already gained plenty of Juju points by helping Rosenborg qualify for the semi-finals of the Europa League after beating Lyon. He could hardly contain his delight.

Moreover, if his team could continue performing well and, by chance, win the Europa League finals, he would acquire a dosage of S-grade vitality-enhancing-elixir as the milestone completion reward from the system. By relying on the elixir, he would be able to push his body fitness to unbelievable levels, the likes that could compete with some of the best footballers of the generation.

Additionally, there was a mouth-watering system reward for becoming the best player for the 2013/14 Europa League tournament. If Zachary could achieve the milestone, he would win himself an S-grade mental conditioning elixir, which would help him elevate his cognitive abilities to the S-grading. Thus, Zachary really hoped that his team could win the Europa League so that he could obtain all those rewards from the system.

"Let's take things slowly," he thought as he dismissed the system interface. "Next, we'll play in the semi-finals against Benfica. As long as we defeat them, then we're in the finals. We can then fight for the trophy with everything in our arsenal."

A smile outlined Zachary's face as he stood up, intending to switch on the television so that he could watch the morning sports news. But just then, he felt feverish and out of energy once again. His temples throbbed, and he felt like standing was a tasking chore. He even had to hold on to the sofa to support himself.

For a moment, Zachary felt a bit alarmed by his abnormal condition. But after recollecting how he'd run for more than ninety minutes in the chilling rain the previous night, he pushed his worries to the back of his mind.

He presumed that the post-match fatigue was still weighing him down. But even then, he still decided to sleep for a few more hours, hoping to quicken his post-match recovery.

He trekked into his bedroom with unsteady steps before diving under the covers. A couple of minutes later, he felt even more fatigued, and his thoughts slowed down until he started sinking into slumberland. His only hope at that juncture was that his body would return back to normal after he woke up. That way, he would be able to train a little bit more and make adequate preparations for the upcoming matches.

Chapter 369 Sickness

Zachary forgot everything else after sinking into slumberland. Weird and messy visions coursed through his consciousness as he turned and tossed under the covers. Then, his mind seemed to gain clarity, and he dreamt about the ghostly phantom he'd chanced upon just after his rebirth.

The man-shaped apparition slowly and steadily grew more vivid within his mind's eye. It was just as he remembered, with a prominent silvery ragged line across its neck and charcoal black skin. Its tattered regal attire and the crown of leaves and grass on its head matched well with its bottomless soulless eyes to bring out a creepy savageness from within its hazy form.

"Eh! What the hell!"

The next moment, Zachary's entire psyche stretched taut with tension as he felt the phantom's gaze land upon him. It smiled creepily, and its chapped lips moved just a bit, seemingly as if it was about to communicate something verbally. But just then, a loud ringing sound resounded within Zachary's mind and shattered the weird illusion.

The bizarre visions faded quickly, and Zachary woke up with a start. The first thing his foggy mind registered was the loud ringing of the doorbell that was constantly resounding across his entire apartment. The sound was sharp and jarring to his ears, causing him to frown with discomfort.

Zachary stepped out of bed and slowly trekked toward his living room while still in a daze. He labored a bit on unsteady strides and finally made it to the front door. Without even bothering to check who was behind it, he immediately pulled it open in one swift motion.

"Zachary!" A familiar voice registered in his ears as he focused on the slender silhouette standing before his door. "Are you okay? Why aren't you picking up your phone?"

"Kristin!" Zachary exclaimed, trying to shake off his dazed state. He was startled to see his long-time neighbor and publicity secretary at the door. "Is anything the matter?"

Kristin glanced at him as a tinge of worry flickered across her eyes. "Are you okay?" She asked. "Emily, Coach Bjørn Peters, and a few others have tried to contact you many times today? But you didn't pick up your phone even once. So, in the end, Emily sent me here to check on you."

"Many people have been trying to call me!" Zachary's eyes narrowed slightly. "What time is it now?"

"6:23 PM," Kristin replied.

"What!?" Zachary's eyes widened. He was even more alarmed. The whole situation was strange as he'd only napped for a seemingly short while. "How could I sleep for the entire day?"

Zachary opened his lips, about to ask a few more questions. But just then, he felt an intense dizzy sensation impact his mind. His strong legs seemed to be filled with jelly for a moment, and he found it hard to maintain his standing posture.

"I think I might be sick," Zachary said to Kristin as he supported himself on the doorframe. "I woke up feeling very weak today morning. Then, I decided to sleep, and that's why I didn't hear my phone ringing."

"You're sick?" Kristin asked, her eyes narrowing. "Or could it be the exhaustion from yesterday's game?"

"I have never felt this week after any game. So, I'm pretty sure that I'm ill."

Zachary sighed dejectedly and flexed his biceps. He had been looking forward to continuing his intensive training the following day. But it seemed his health had betrayed him.

"Sorry to hear about your condition," Kristin said after observing him for a few more seconds. "I'm sure that you'll get well soon. Let me call Emily first so that she can organize your treatment right away."

"Thank you, Kristin," Zachary said, forcing a smile.

"You're welcome," she said while fishing out her phone from her jumper pocket. "But don't stay on your feet when you're sick. Just settle or lie down somewhere comfortable while I call Emily. I don't want you to collapse and hurt yourself before the medics get here."

"Okay, thanks again," Zachary said and nodded at Kristin before turning around and returning to his living room.

Zachary was surprised by Emily's efficiency that evening. She was quick to organize an ambulance, and before long, Zachary arrived at St. Olav's hospital, where he received appreciable care from the medics there. They diagnosed his condition and quickly took blood tests to determine whether he'd caught a grave illness.

But in the end, they figured out that it was just a common cold that had aggravated his post-match fatigue and weighed him down considerably. Nonetheless, the doctors still insisted that he stay at the hospital for observation due to his severe symptoms. They assigned him a bed in the private ward before putting him under IV drip therapy and a few other common cold medications.

About thirty minutes later, when the clock hand was just about to point to the 9:15 PM mark, the effect of the drugs kicked in, and Zachary felt his thoughts slowing down. Before long, he drifted off into slumberland and forgot everything else.

He was out of touch with reality for a seemingly long time before regaining his usual mental faculties. When he finally came to and opened his eyes again, it was already the following morning. Golden sun rays seeped into the hospital room through the enormous window on the opposite wall to illuminate his pale face, and he smiled as his spirit brightened. Even while lying down, he could still feel that his condition had greatly improved after a night of rest.

He glanced around, trying to acclimatize himself to his surroundings, and that's when he noticed Camilla sitting by his hospital bed. She appeared a bit worn out, seemingly as if she had last slept a few days ago. But that didn't stop her from looking as charming as ever, especially in her fitting denim jeans and a cardigan sweater that matched the green color of her eyes.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," she said, looking at him tenderly. "How're you feeling?"

"Good morning, Camilla," he replied, smiling back at her. "I think I feel great. When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday night, at around 10:30 PM," she replied. "But by then, you were already asleep. So, I didn't try to wake you."

Zachary smiled, feeling a warm sensation swelling up within him. "Thanks for being there for me."

"There's no need for thanks as that's what I should do," she said. "As your girlfriend, I should always be there for you during trying times. Isn't that the way it should be?"

"I think so," Zachary said a bit uncertainly as he wasn't sure where she was heading with the train of conversation.

Camilla smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "Actually," she said, "I was a bit hurt after realizing that I only managed to learn about your condition after you had already spent more than an hour in the hospital. And then when I first saw you lying on the hospital bed yesternight, I regretted not being there for you much sooner. But now, after seeing you wake up, all my gloominess has been swept away. I'm really delighted that you've gotten better."

"Thank you," Zachary said. "Do you know what time it is?"

"Just a moment." Camilla extended her hand and picked up her handbag from the chair next to hers. She quickly fished her phone from the bag and glanced at the screen. "Five minutes remaining to 9:00 AM," she said.

"That late!" Zachary exclaimed. He was surprised that a simple common cold had forced him to sleep for more than twenty hours.

"You shouldn't worry about anything else," Camilla advised. "Your agent mentioned that she has already informed your coaches about your condition. You only need to focus on recovering for the moment."

Zachary nodded and closed his still weary eyes. His mind immediately started going over the previous day's events, and then he recalled how he'd dreamt about the ghostly phantom for the first time ever.

The escapade had crept him out considerably even in his dreams, and he'd only managed to forget about it after his mind sunk further into a dazed state. But after his condition improved and he gained clarity that morning, the whole train of events manifested in his mind again. He thought about the dream for a few minutes, but in the end, he discarded it as just another weird episode of his life.

He opened his eyes, and his spirits brightened once again. He immediately resumed his conversation with Camilla, and they continued discussing many issues, big and small. They only concluded their talk when Emily arrived roughly thirty minutes later.

"Zachary," Camilla said after exchanging greetings with Emily. "I have to go now as I have a crucial meeting at work, which I can't miss. So, I'll see you later in the evening." She leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the cheek before stepping away.

Zachary smiled. "Enjoy your day. And please hurry up and go. I don't want you to miss your meeting because of me."

"Okay then," she replied, smiling back. "See you again in the evening. Ensure to rest so that you can recover faster. And don't run off to train somewhere in secret."

Zachary chuckled. "Don't worry. I plan to rest for the whole day since I also wish to recover faster."

"Great," Camilla said and then nodded at Emily. Without saying anything else, she picked up her bag and made her way out of the room.

Chapter 370 Desire for Playing Time

There were a few seconds of silence in the hospital room after Camilla stepped out of the room. Then Emily turned her gaze from the tightly shut door before eyeing Zachary. "Your girlfriend is a true beauty," she said.

"Yes, she is quite gorgeous," Zachary agreed with a smile. "Thanks for organizing treatment for me yesterday, by the way. My condition might have worsened if you hadn't sent Kristin to check on me."

"Don't mention it," Emily said with a smile as she settled on one of the seats by his bedside. "Taking care of my client is my duty. Otherwise, how would I be able to make money when you're sick?"

Zachary chuckled while turning slightly to make himself more comfortable on the pillow. "I have been meaning to ask: How far with the process to acquire a Schengen visa for my grandma? Have you managed to make any progress?"

"I have already started the application process," she said. "If all goes as planned, your grandma should have a Norwegian residence card within a month. The card will allow her to gain permission to enter all European countries, except the UK, of course."

Zachary smiled. "Thanks a lot," he said. "The doctors also said they would discharge her from the rehabilitation center in about a month's time. If we have already obtained the residence card by that time, we can quickly transfer her to Norway."

"Don't worry," Emily said. "I'll do my best to ensure that she gets the residence card within the fastest time possible. As for you, you should only focus on getting well at the moment. Don't strain yourself thinking about other issues during the next few days."

"I think I'm already getting better," Zachary said, shifting slightly on the bed. "I'll probably be able to leave the hospital tomorrow morning."

"That isn't a good idea," Emily said with a sigh. "You should rest for the next five to seven days and ensure that you've totally recovered before returning to your usual routine. I have already discussed this with Coach Johansen, and he totally agrees with me on this point. He's the one who even insisted that you take a week off from football. So, you don't need to worry that he will fault you for missing training over the next seven days."

"A week away from football!" Zachary raised a brow. "Isn't that too much and totally unnecessary?"

"Not according to the doctors," Emily said. "The medics are the ones who advised the coach to let you take seven days off football. They insisted that the time is needed for your body to go through a complete recovery."

"A whole seven days!" Zachary mumbled dejectedly. "That's quite a long time away from football."

Due to the insistence of his coaches and agent, Zachary ended up spending two more days in the hospital. He even watched Rosenborg's Tippeligaen game against Odds BK on a computer within his hospital room. Fortunately, his absence seemed not to have impacted the team, and Rosenborg managed to defeat the opponents by a score of 2:0, courtesy of goals from Karl Toko Ekambi and Nicki Nielsen.

After watching the game against Odds BK, Zachary's legs and feet felt itchy. An intense hunger to play competitive football blossomed within his mind, and he put his foot down and insisted that he wished to return to training as soon as possible.

Due to his unwavering attitude, the doctors, coaches, and Emily all compromised and permitted him to leave the hospital the following day. But they also made him promise to take it easy over the next few days by following a light training regimen.

Zachary, of course, agreed and left the hospital the following morning. He was finally free again, and so he recommenced his training immediately. He could not afford to waste any time since he was a man with lofty goals.

Zachary followed the doctors' instructions over the next few days and didn't perform strenuous exercises. He kept his training simple and went through only yoga routines and light conditioning drills with the sole and primary aim of maintaining his match fitness.

The days flashed by fast as he trained alone, and the remnant adverse effects of his illness soon vanished from his body. He was as strong as a wild ox and as fit as a fiddle again. So, he started going through intensive workouts in preparation for Rosenborg's next domestic match against FK Bodø/Glimt. He even took part in the last two team training sessions conducted by his coaches on Thursday and Friday.

But even after exerting all his efforts to attain match fitness, Coach Johansen still left Zachary out of the squad heading to Bodø Municipality for the Saturday game. The coach summoned him after the training on Friday and explained that he needed to reserve all his energy for the Europa League semi-final against Benfica the following Thursday. As for the match against FK Bodø/Glimt, the coach mentioned that he didn't need to care about it as Rosenborg would be able to win with only a few first-team players.

Zachary didn't complain since he understood the coach's intentions. The only issue that made him uncomfortable was losing out on match bonuses that could amount to a few million Norwegian Kroners. But for the big picture — for the team's good, he still hardened himself and snuffed out the slight feeling of discontent that was threatening to blossom within him.

The next evening.

"A man has got to sacrifice for the greater picture," Zachary thought as he settled down to watch Rosenborg's Saturday game against FK Bodø/Glimt with Camilla in his living room. He would be lying if he said that he didn't desire to be on the pitch with his teammates in the Aspmýra Stadion located in Bodø.

He yearned to participate in the game, to feel the intense thrill of taking on opponents with all his heart. But at the same time, he also understood that he needed to reserve his energy for the Europa League semi-final. So, he breathed out deeply to relax before putting his arm around Camilla's and starting to follow the game on the screen.

The game proceeded as expected. Even at an away ground, the Rosenborg team, comprising players like Yerry Mina, Takumi Minamino, and Thomas Partey, dominated FK Bodø/Glimt from the first minute. The Troll Kids arrayed themselves in a 4-3-3 formation and utilized a mixture of wing play, counter-pressing, and counterattacking tactics to dictate the tempo.

Eventually, the floodgates opened, and Ole Selnes unleashed a missile of a shot from outside the 18-yard box to score Rosenborg's first goal during the 34th minute. Ten minutes later, during the 44th minute, Rosenborg found the back of the net once again after John Chibuike perfectly connected with a cross from Karl Toko Ekambi.

And finally, in the 84th minute, during the late stages of the second half, Paul Kasongo got to the end of a through-pass from Takumi Minamino to score Rosenborg's third goal for the evening. After that, there were no more goals in the game, and Rosenborg BK managed to defeat FK Bodø/Glimt by three goals to nil, even while playing away from home and without Zachary.

The win had taken Rosenborg to the top of the Tippeligaen table with four wins equating to twelve points from four matches. On the other hand, Strømsgodset, the second team on the table, had only ten points, while Molde, the third team, had only nine points from the same number of games.

It was a dream start of the season for team Rosenborg — a feat that caused Zachary's heart to go on a wild caper within his chest. He really enjoyed and prided himself in being part of a team on a winning streak. He was already swelling with the team spirit, and the sentiment prompted him to desire to give his best when he faced Benfica in Lisbon, Portugal, the following Thursday.